

What YOU can do

- ✓ **DO** leave grass clippings on the lawn. This free, natural fertilizer will help keep your lawn healthy and green.
- ✓ **DO** test your soil. If the pH of the lawn is too low, the grass cannot absorb the fertilizer, no matter how much you use.
- ✓ **DO** use up to a half-inch of compost as organic fertilizer on your lawn or garden.

If you feel you must fertilize...

- ✓ **DO** fertilize sparingly. Fall is the best time to fertilize, before October 15. If you must fertilize in the spring, wait until your lawn greens up.
- ✗ **DON'T** fertilize in the summer when your lawn is naturally dormant. Also, don't fertilize from November through March.
- ✓ **DO** choose a slow-release fertilizer that release nutrients over time and are less likely to burn your lawn. Slow-release nitrogen is listed on the bag as "water insoluble nitrogen."
- ✗ **DON'T** apply fertilizer immediately before a heavy rainfall - a half-inch or more of rain - which washes fertilizer off your lawn and into storm drains.
- ✗ **DON'T** apply fertilizer within 100 feet of a waterbody.
- ✓ **DO** immediately sweep up any fertilizer that is spilled onto an impervious surface such as a street, sidewalk or driveway.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bristol Conservation Commission

bristolri.gov/conservation-commission/

University of Rhode Island Extension

web.uri.edu/coopext

For Soil Testing:

web.uri.edu/mastergardener/soil-testing-service/

Save Bristol Harbor

savebristolharbor.com

Save The Bay

savebay.org/Bay-Friendly-Living

Clean Ocean Access

cleanoceanaccess.org

R.I. Department of Environmental Management

dem.ri.gov

This brochure was produced through the collaborative efforts of the Bristol Conservation Commission, Save Bristol Harbor, and Save The Bay.

For more information, contact Tony Morettini with the Bristol Conservation Commission at tmorettini@gmail.com.

HEALTHY YARDS



Sustainable Lawn Care
A guide for homeowners

The Problem

The nutrients in fertilizer – mainly nitrogen and phosphorus – are major contributors to water pollution and algae blooms in Narragansett Bay and its watershed.

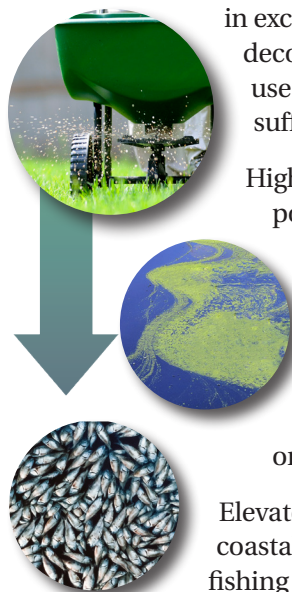
Just as fertilizer makes your grass green, it can also make waters green by fueling rapid algae growth. Stormwater runoff carries fertilizers into nearby waterbodies, resulting

in excessive algae growth and decomposition. This process uses oxygen in the water and suffocates other aquatic life.

High levels of phosphorus in ponds and lakes, caused by polluted stormwater runoff, can cause cyanobacteria—or blue-green algae—to grow which can, in turn, make those waters unsafe for human or animal contact.

Elevated levels of nitrogen in coastal waters can impact shell-fishing and, in some cases, create “dead zones” and fish kills.

Save Bristol Harbor water quality monitoring volunteers have recorded high levels of nitrogen in several sampling locations along Silver Creek. **Algal blooms have been noted in Mill Pond, Silver Creek and the Kickemuit River.** More details about this monitoring can be found at savebristolharbor.com.



Solutions

The following simple steps will save you time and money AND reduce your yard's impact on water quality in both Narragansett Bay and local waterbodies.

- ◆ **Select drought- and disease-tolerant grass seed.** *Red fescue and chewing fescue are drought tolerant; tall and fine fescues require less nitrogen and need less fertilizer, if any.*
- ◆ **Set your mower's cutting height to three inches.** *Grass cut at a height of three inches creates a healthier root system and decreases the need for water and fertilizer.*
- ◆ **Keep the clippings on the lawn.** *When left on the lawn, grass clippings reduce water evaporation and keep soil cooler during hot weather. They also return nutrients to the soil, reducing the need for added fertilizer.*
- ◆ **Water less often.** *Most lawns in New England will survive without watering. Healthy lawns that turn brown during hot dry periods are dormant, not dead, and will green up again during the wetter, cooler fall season.*

Overwatering can cause fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides to run off lawns and flow into storm drains and nearby waterbodies. Fertilizer on your lawn can leach into the groundwater perhaps endangering drinking water supplies.

If you must water, do so before 9 a.m. to reduce evaporation and prevent sun scalding.

- ◆ **Test your soil.** *Maintaining proper soil pH of 6.5 results in better retention and absorption of nutrients. Phosphorus should only be applied to new lawns or where a soil test indicates a phosphorus deficiency. Soil testing can be performed by URI's Master Gardeners. (See back panel.)*
- ◆ **Fertilize in early fall for best results.** *An application of fertilizer in September should be plenty for your lawn.*
- ◆ **Be careful not to apply fertilizer to sidewalks, driveways or walkways.** *Sweep up any fertilizer on paved surfaces.*
- ◆ **Opt for organic fertilizers** *like animal manures, cottonseed, bone meal, fish emulsion or compost. If you use commercial fertilizers, select those with more than 50% water insoluble fertilizer. Water insoluble fertilizers release nitrogen slowly over extended periods of time and are less likely to leach into groundwater or cause water quality problems. These fertilizers are typically labelled as “slow release” products.*
- ◆ **Only use pesticides sparingly and in a targeted manner.** *Be careful when shopping for chemicals: pesticides and fertilizers are often combined in one bag (“weed and feed”) but avoid these if you only need one or the other.*

